DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 010 CS 210 200

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TITLE Write On: Improving Learning through Writing.
PUB DATE Nov 86
NOTE 45p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (76th, San Antonio, TX, November 21-26, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Development; *Content Area Writing; Elementary Secondary Education; *Integrated Activities; *Learning Strategies; *Teaching Methods; *Writing Exercises; *Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS *Writing across the Curriculum

ABSTRACT

Writing across the curriculum, or "writing-as-learning" (WAL), represents one of the most successful developments in writing instruction. WAL is an efficient teaching method for achieving educational goals in today's society because it effectively engages students in both the means and the ends of their education. Research has shown that WAL activities improve the quality of students' writing and, more significantly, students' content learning. To effectively utilize these activities, content must be kept at the center of the writing process; writing assignments must engage students in learning specific subject matter through actively gathering, evaluating, internalizing, and sharing the material. The following characteristics are essential to all meaningful WAL activities: (1) clear and specific content objectives, (2) effective and engaging writing activities to accomplish these objectives, (3) clear explanation of the evaluative criteria, (4) effective involvement of students in the writing process, and (5) positive, nonthreatening teacher responses. These characteristics are also important for all five interrelated steps of the writing process: prewriting, writing, revision, editing, and sharing/publishing. (Appendixes include a WAL activity worksheet, writing assignment worksheet, reader evaluation sheet, guide for evaluating essays, consideration of reflective responses, and discussion of the worksheets presented.) (JD)

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# WRITE ON:

# IMPROVING LEARNING THROUGH WRITING

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As professional educators, we did not need national commissions and studies to tell us that the crisis in education is real. At worst, far too many students drop out or are belligerant and restless; at best, far too many students are apathetic and indifferent. Our professional frustrations further increase with the constant bombardment of news that standardized test scores continue to decline, remedial courses at all levels continue to grow in frightening numbers, and businesses and colleges continue to complain that public school graduates are not prepared for even rudimentary tasks.

However exaggerated and misleading the criticisms of public schools have often been, this attention has helped cause the needed re-examination of our profession and the development of new methods to improve the quality of educational experiences of our students. The exploration and development of Higher Order/Critical Thinking Skills materials and strategies, active listening skills techniques, and other new pedagogical innovations are among the most positive work being done today. One of the most successful and promising of these developing new methodologies is that of Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing-As-Learning, the use of writing as the means of improving student content learning. The following is a very brief background, theory, overview, and sample strategy for those who may be interested in exploring the use of such methods in their own classrooms. It is not necessary to read this document in its entirety; the separate sections are labeled for ease of

identification. Select any section which appeals to you. I am by no means an "expert" in language arts or Writing-As-Learning: however, if I can be of further assistance or if you wish to discuss any aspect of Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing-As-Learning, please contact me.

## PEDAGOGICAL BACKGROUND

Despite the on-going technological changes in society, the basic goals of education have not changed significantly; children still need to develop basic intellectual skills and to learn to think critically. Our traditional pedagogical methods have always been based upon the involvement of students with the materials and experiences of their education: the inter-action of the students with the materials and experiences produced the desired learning. Our traditional methods of reading, lectures, etc. were effective in accomplishing our educational goals because the background experiences of our students were such that these methods did engage them with the provided materials and experiences and effective learning did result.

The importance of language in all learning can not be over-emphasized. Language is not only the means of communication: it is the means of thinking itself. Writing is the highly complex physical activity of utilizing language symbols to understand and share our language and thinking, and the emphasis in Writing-As-Learning is on the physical nature of the activity. Writing-As-Learning activities are premised on learning by doing; students are forced to physically "think" through the writing assignments. The act of writing is both the means of helping students understand/evaluate/internalize the material

and then to share their beliefs about the material. In all Writing-As-Learning activities, the importance of the concept of writing as "thinking on paper" can not be emphasized enough; the use of the writing as the means of learning is crucial.

The importance of writing as the means of learning is essential in evaluating our traditional methods with today's students. The value and effectiveness of many of these traditional methods have changed dramatically with the glow of the television and the hum of the computer. Many children today have come to believe and act upon the premise that learning/education is a passive activity; it is something that is done to them and for them. As graduates of Sesame Street, Electric Company, and countless hours of non-educational video experiences, children have been taught that if they sit and wait or push the correct button on the computer, the correct "answer" will appear. For many children, the medium has indeed become the message, and thus many of them have serious problems in adjusting to the traditional demands of the educational system. While it is not their fault, active reading, listening, and thinking have become very difficult experiences for many of our students, and many of our traditional educational methodologies and strategies which were based on these skills are no longer effective for our students. Educational methods need not be "fun and games," but they must be "engaging" activities which effectively involve students in their education and make both the means and ends of learning meaningful. Education must become more "engaging" and more heuristic, and students must become actively involved in both the means and ends of their education.

As professional educators, we must fully recognize the nature and

degree of this change in our students and develop more efficient methods to accomplish the goals of education. Tragically, many of the initial recommendations of the national commissions and studies are, many believe, ineffective at best and counter-productive at worst. The calls for mandatory homework, "back to basics," etc. are all predicated on the assumption that traditional methods will be effective if forced upon today's students, and while the long term values of such an approach are not yet clear, initial results are mixed at best. A growing number of educators have begun to re-examine both the problems of education and the proposed solutions, and out of this "second wave" of recommendations has come the exploration and development of the Higher Order/Critical Thinking Skills materials and strategies, the active listening techniques, etc. as ways of more efficiently involving students in their educational experiences. The emphasis is clearly upon the development of new methodologies; the emphasis in "time on task" must be primarily on the "task" not the "time." Again, one of the most promising of these new methodologies is that of Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing-As-Learning, the use of writing as the medium through which content learning takes place.

## CAVEAT

Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing-As-Learning strategies are not magical. The use of these techniques will not make all students suddenly enthusiastic about school. Like all methods, they will work for some students in some classes during some semesters and may not work with other students in similar circumstances, and like all methods, they need

constant evaluation and modification to meet changing needs. Before sharing more specific ideas about these strategies, five "warnings" must be made clear for those who may wish to explore such techniques in their classrooms.

1. Perhaps most crucial is an issue not directly related to Writing-As-Learning. The exploration of and/or use of these techniques does not mean or imply that one is now an ineffective teacher or "bad" teacher. These strategies are merely tools and techniques as are the use of workbooks, calculators, computers, and typewriters; they are the means to help students better achieve a quality education. The exploration, experimentation, and/or use of these techniques is in no way an implied criticism of what one is now doing in the classroom. As professional educators, we should always do all we can to improve the educational experiences for our students, and if anything, such experimentation should be encouraged. The approach toward the use of these Writing-As-Learning techniques by those who choose to explore them and by those who would judge those who do so should be positive and encouraging.

2. The attitude of the instructor in utilizing Writing-As-Learning activities is crucial. Well designed innovative assignments will not only be more valuable for our students but will be more "enjoyable" for the instructor to read, respond to, and grade. The instructor who utilizes Writing-As-Learning activities must fully "buy into" these strategies and techniques and must be supportive and encouraging with students as they work through the writing process. Many assignments must eventually be evaluated or formally graded, but what must be avoided is the premature "grading" and criticism in the Writing-As-Learning activities. Instructors must do all possible to make

language and writing "user friendly;" the use of language as the means of thinking and communication must be developed/emphasized as positively as possible. Instructor praise, instructor modeling, use of the "Reflective Response" (see appendix), etc. are necessary to reinforce the validity and importance of the Writing-As-Learning approach. Since the writing is literally the learning, a negative judgmental evaluation within the process will destroy the entire purpose and value of the activity. Emphasis on the correctness and form of the assignment must occur, but this emphasis must occur late in the process of developing the assignment. Primary emphasis must be on the quality of the learning first and then emphasis on the correctness and forms of sharing the learning.

3. The use of these Writing-As-Learning activities is NOT an addition to what an instructor is already doing in the classroom; such techniques must be in lieu of some present methods. Most instructors do not have time to adequately or effectively teach what is now expected in most courses, and instructors spend far too much time in "covering" material as it is. If one is to explore/utilize these techniques, one must make a professional judgment about which current methods will be replaced. As trite as it sounds, the emphasis must be on quality, not quantity. Extensive use of these Writing-As-Learning activities may reduce the amount of material "covered" in a course, but the quality of learning will be significantly higher. Importantly, Writing-As-Learning activities may help students "uncover" more valuable learning skills and attitudes.

4. The use of these techniques does not mean that content teachers will become or need to become English or Language Arts teachers. These

strategies are built upon the use of writing, not the teaching of writing. Other than a brief explanation of the writing process, class work within the process, and any comments the instructor chooses to make about the quality of student writing, the emphasis is always on the quality of content. One need not and should not be overly concerned about teaching dangling participles and split infinitives to utilize Writing-As-Learning techniques: in fact, such emphasis will defeat the purpose and value of the activities. Such mechanical and grammatical considerations are vital, but they should be emphasized only at the end of the development of the assignment as the student prepares to share the assignment.

5. Those who are considering exploration/use of these techniques must also be aware of the time investment required and of the need for constant experimentation and modification. The design of effective assignments, the assistance and encouragement given to students, and the responses/evaluation to the assignments do demand a considerable time investment, but the benefits of more effective student learning are worth the investment.

Early design and experimentation with such Writing-As-Learning activities will result in some failures and frustration. As with all methods, instructors must constantly modify such activities to make them as valuable as possible for students. Just as writing is more effective and enjoyable for students as a "group activity," so too many teachers benefit from forming a group or network of others who are experimenting with or utilizing Writing-As-Learning activities. The sharing of successes, failures, frustrations, and specific assignment ideas is excellent therapy.

DEVELOPMENT

In American education, writing has traditionally be used as a means of showing what has been learned; the writing has usually been the outcome or "product" of the learning. The essay, the research paper, etc. were in a sense "outside" of the actual context in which the learning occurred; these types of writing were a means to measure and evaluate what had been learned. While the use of such writing activities has been and still is valuable in many circumstances, this use of writing presupposes that learning has taken place and will be shown in the written paper. Unfortunately, the experiences of those who assign such student writing clearly show that this is all too often not the case, and if learning has not occurred, the "product" will not be successful or effective. In such circumstances, students develop antagonism toward both the content and toward writing.

Many language arts instructors responded to the "Why Johnny and Jane Can't Write" criticisms of education by exploring and developing more effective ways to utilize and "teach" writing skills within language arts classrooms and within content area classrooms. In all honesty, many of the language arts instructors who initially espoused "Writing Across the Curriculum" activities were interested in improving traditional language arts/writing skills. Certainly the quality of the formal writing done for the content area instructor would also improve, but the emphasis was clearly upon improving the writing itself. Evaluations done about the the effectiveness of such "Writing Across the Curriculum" techniques showed that the quality of the student writing did improve, but much more significantly, tests of student

content learning showed remarkable increases. These non-traditional writing activities more effectively "engaged" students in dealing with the content material and dramatically improved content learning, thinking skills, and the use of language. The development of such "Writing Across the Curriculum" activities continues today, and this use of written language as the medium through which subject matter learning occurs is one of the most exciting and beneficial pedagogies being explored.

## OVERVIEW AND SUGGESTIONS

The essential element in utilizing Writing-As-Learning is to keep content as the center of the writing process. The emphasis must always be on the quality of content; writing assignments must "engage" students in learning the subject matter through actively gathering, evaluating, internalizing, and sharing the material. These activities should demand discovery, inquiry, and synthesis rather than merely recounting factual material. Most experts argue that exercises which demand only factual recall should be done as objective tests; the use of "writing" to measure only factual content learning often defeats the use of truly meaningful writing activities. Writing-As-Learning activities are most effective when students are asked to put learning together and apply it to a new situation or in a new context. With such activities, content does NOT have to be taught before application; the application (assignment) is the means as well as the end of teaching the content. This concept is essential for instructors to understand when utilizing these activities.

The following is an overview of how a Writing-As-Learning activity can be developed; however, as a generalization, the specific elements can and should be modified to meet individual class needs. The importance of clear and specific content objectives, effective "engaging" writing activities to meet/accomplish these objectives, the clear explanation of the evaluative criteria, the effective involvement of students in the writing process, and the positive teacher responses and encouragement are, however, essential in all meaningful Writing-As-Learning activities. (All parenthetical comments, observations, and suggestions are my personal beliefs based on my own class research and use of these activities.)

A. The key to all effective instruction is open and honest communication, and one of the most effective ways to begin the exploration/use of Writing-As-Learning activities is to discuss the "why and how" of these activities with classes at the beginning of the course. For most students, these activities will be a new experience, and much student confusion and concern can be reduced if we are honest with them about our effort to utilize these activities. Just as we need to explain the goals, objectives, and criteria for each individual Writing-As-Learning activity, a class discussion about the general concept and use of such activities can help create the positive inter-action needed to make these activities truly successful. We need to emphasize that this a new use for writing, and we need to as positive and supportive as possible.

Sharing samples of Writing-As-Learning activities, samples of effective and ineffective student papers, comparison and contrast of Writing-As-Learning activities with traditional writing activities, sharing of of our own completion of such assignments, class completion of sample exercises, etc. can make the

student introduction to and use of these activities as effective as possible. The key is to explain the entire approach as fully and honestly as possible to try to involve students in this concept as early and positively as possible.

This initial class overview is the logical and most effective place to introduce the students to the concept of the "writing process" which the students will utilize in the completion of the activities. Again, other than any comments the instructor chooses to make about the student writing per se in responding to the assignments, this is the only "teaching" of writing which needs to be done to utilize Writing-As-Learning activities.

The "writing process" involves five inter-related steps:

PRE-WRITING: Traditionally, pre-writing activities include awareness of the background material, research, awareness of forms, etc. which are necessary to complete the writing assignment. However, pre-writing activities should include everything which occurs before the students begin the first formal draft of the assignment; this includes discussion of the assignment's objectives, the evaluative/grading criteria, class discussion about the assignment, discussion of sample assignments, class completion of related activities, etc.. This time spent in gathering information, taking notes, and in pre-writing discussions can be just as important as the actual time spent in writing the drafts and can efficiently reduce the amount of time and number of rough drafts needed in the writing stage. The pre-writing stage should help students understand the assignment and evaluative/grading criteria clearly and help them focus upon the nature of the writing task(s) they will be completing. (Sharing the specifics of the "Writing As Learning Activity Worksheet" and the use of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" are extremely valuable in this pre-writing stage.)

WRITING: This is the stage of student work on the formal required piece of writing. The student will probably write several drafts with the goal of producing a paper which will meet the announced evaluative/grading criteria (and achieve the content learning we desire.) The WRITING and REVISION stages are over-lapping, and the use of the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" is very valuable in both of these stages.

(My own experience has been that all learning and all writing are more effective if students can participate in these as "group" activities. Students should be encouraged to seek responses to their ideas and writings throughout the entire writing process and should be willing to provide responses to the ideas and writings of others. Students need to be given practice in responding to each other's works both orally and in writing (see the "Reader Evaluation Sheet), and the method of oral response is exactly the same as on the "Reader Evaluation Sheet." Certainly, students need to made aware of the problems and punishments for plagarism, but the "group" approach to learning and writing is not utilized as fully as it should be. I try to make clear to students that I am not the only person in the room who can read and write, and the key to being an effective reader and providing assistance to others is simply to be honest about what we read. I also make clear that as the instructor I simply do not have the time necessary to provide the number of responses requested by students; as a matter of necessity they must learn to utilize each other. This use of the "group" approach also allows the instructor more time to help those who most need extra assistance; students can solve many of their minor problems among themselves.)

REVISION: This is an on-going part of the WRITING stage, but this stage is not merely the correcting of mechanical, grammatical, and spelling errors. REVISION is the re-shaping if necessary of the paper to most effectively meet the criteria of the assignment. Revision means "re-seeing" what has been produced and re-shaping it to most effectively meet the content and structural demands of the assignment. Again, the use of the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" and oral responses to one's writing are crucial in helping one work most successfully.

EDITING: This is the stage for correcting the mechanical, grammatical, and spelling errors, the "presentation skills," and this is the stage to make sure that the paper demonstrates an effective use of Standard Written English. Again, emphasis on these conventions of communication is important, but such emphasis must occur at the end of the writing process. The primary emphasis throughout the development of the assignment must be on the quality of the content and then on the sharing of the content clearly and correctly. (The "group" approach works well here also. Students can read simply to make sure of each other's use of the language. Each classroom should have copies of dictionaries, thesauruses, and Basic English Revisited available for student use, and students should be encouraged to use these often.)

SHARING/PUBLISHING: Each assignment should not end when the papers are turned in for evaluation/grading. Certainly, each paper deserves individual instructor praise and response, but the instructor's sharing of general reactions to the student completion of the assignment, sharing specific paper orally or in writing, etc. are very important in reinforcing the value of such assignments

and prepares students effectively for future Writing-As-Learning assignments. The SHARING/PUBLISHING should be the basis for both instructor and student assessment and evaluation of the content learning and for future assignments which build upon previous assignments.

(This overview and explanation of the "writing process" sound very complex, but if one is open and honest about the use of Writing-As-Learning activities and takes the time to "walk through" several sample assignments and provides positive reinforcement to students, the approach is readily accepted and utilized by many students.)

B. For each specific Writing-As-Learning activity, the development begins with the instructor's determination of the specific content objectives, and the importance of these content objectives can not be over-emphasized. All Writing-As-Learning activities are content oriented, and both the instructor and the students must know what specific knowledge/skills are to be developed through each assignment. (See the "Writing As Learning Activity Worksheet.")

C. Once the specific content objectives are determined, the key to the Writing-As-Learning activity is to develop writing assignments which will help students to achieve these objectives. The writing assignment must force/demand/engage the students in gathering, assimilating, evaluating, and utilizing the material to successfully complete the assignment· the learning is generated through both the work on the assignment and in the final paper. Traditional forms of writing assignments, essays, research papers, etc., are often effective, but Writing-As-Learning activities are most effective if more "creative." Assignments which demand a wide range of formats, structures, audiences, and purposes will more efficiently "engage"

students in dealing with the material. (The types of assignments which can be designed are literally unlimited. For example, ask for dialogues or letters among/between historical characters or historical characters in specific situations. "Assume you are Davy Crockett at the Alamo the night before the final battle. Write a letter to your wife explaining why you feel justified in fighting/dying for Texas freedom." "Assume you are Harry Truman in early 1945. Write a speech for the nation explaining whether you will or will not use the atom bomb against Japan."

(Another effective type of assignment is to ask students to write for a specific audience. "Using what you have learned about volleyball this semester, write a guide to volleyball for junior high students explaining the fundamentals, the rules, and suggestions for winning." "Using what you have learned in Consumer Economics about loans, write a letter to your parents giving them advice about purchasing a new home." "Write a clear description and explanation of the physics experiment completed today so that a class of 5th grade students will understand the theory and principle involved."

(Asking students to write in different formats is also very effective. "Write an in-depth profile of Adolph Hitler for People magazine dated 1950." "Using the math principle you learned today, create three word problems which demand the use of this principle to solve.") Again, the key to the assignment is to create a situation which will force/help students to truly acquire the content in order to meet the objectives of the assignment, and the more "creative" the assignment, the more effectively involved many students become.

(Giving students choices of several assignments is often very effective; individual students will respond differently and have different successes with different types of assignments. The wider the range of options, the more successful the assignment and subsequent learning. Also, giving students the option of creating their own assignments and evaluative criteria is another effective way to allow students to explore and learn about specific aspects of the content which interest them.)

D. In context of the objectives for the writing assignment, it is essential to make sure that students clearly understand the evaluative/grading criteria. Again, for each assignment a discussion of these criteria and a discussion of sample responses and/or class completion of sample assignments are very effective. Students must know what they must do to complete the assignment successfully, and class discussions of these criteria can prevent needless problems later in the assignment. (The use of both effective and ineffective responses to the assignments is very valuable for students. Early in the course, this is an opportune time to involve the class in sample completion of the entire writing process and discussion of effective assignment completion. This non-threatening practice is crucial in establishing a positive attitude toward the Writing-As-Learning activities.)

E. Just as important as the clear explanation of the objectives, the nature of the assignments, and the grading/evaluative criteria is that adequate time be given for the completion of the assignment. Providing time for successful completion of the assignment is essential to demonstrate to students that we believe such writing assignments are important and worthwhile. Time for "group" work, use of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" and "Reader Evaluation Sheet,"

written and oral responses, revision and editing, and sharing is a must to reinforce the value of such assignments. (Again, students should be encouraged to utilize each other, the instructor, and the reference materials in the room fully during the time given for work on the assignment.)

F. The evaluation/grading of these Writing-As-Learning activities does take more time than does grading objective tests, but such evaluation will be more enjoyable for the instructor. The evaluation should have two parts. Each individual paper should be evaluated and graded (if this was made clear in the initial assignment), and such evaluation should be consistent with the announced criteria. Just as the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" begins with positive responses, then questions, and then suggestions for improvement, so too the instructor's evaluation should be so structured. Students should be given as much credit as possible for what they did learn first and then "penalized" for what they don't know or for failure to follow the assigned guidelines and criteria.

The second part of the evaluation is for instructors to use the completed assignments to assess the success of the assignment and to make modifications for future assignments and to share the instructors' general comments about the assignment with the class. Oral reading, reproduction of copies, and/or posting of copies of the better student papers are valuable for many reasons; students have an opportunity to compare their paper with those which more successfully met the criteria, students who papers are used receive much positive reinforcement, and the sharing prepares students for future Writing-As-Learning assignments.

(One of the options which has proven very effective is to allow students to re-write assignments which were not completed successfully. Some students will revise returned assignments and others will complete totally different assignments. The re-write option is valuable because it helps students to assess their own work while not unduly penalizing them for unsuccessful work. Whether one chooses to allow this option is a personal/professional choice, but if this option is available, students must be made aware of it and how re-writes will be evaluated/graded.)

G. The last step in the Writing-As-Learning process is to build upon the publishing/sharing. The sharing of successful student papers is very important, and much positive attitude can be gained by asking students for permission to keep a copy of their paper for future use as a sample of an effective paper.

The use of assignments in follow-up or subsequent assignments is also important in helping to build upon student learning and to build confidence in students as they improve in such Writing-As-Learning assignments. For both the instructor and students the assignments should be the basis for on-going assessment and future assignments and work. These follow-up activities also reinforce the concept that learning is an on-going and continual process.

H. Some additional personal comments:

1. Most students seem to fear and loathe writing: their experiences in writing have usually been negative. In order to overcome this, students need to have frequent non-threatening writing experiences. Early in a course, assignments can be graded Pass/Fail or Credit/Non-Credit, the

use of "Reflective Responses," and the use of non-graded journals/logbooks can help students overcome their fear and dislike of writing.

The use of a class log is also important in this. The log is a summary of the day's activities. Volunteers or assigned students write brief accounts of the day's lessons in the log, and the log is available for any students who were absent or for those who want to review or check their own notes.

2. The importance of sharing all of the information on the "Writing As Learning Activity Worksheet" and the use of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" can not be stressed enough. The more the students know about the assignment and the more they think about the assignment, the more effectively they will complete the assignment and the more honest communication and involvement in the writing process will be generated.

3. Again, I am totally convinced in the value of the "group" approach to learning and writing. Students must learn to utilize each other and trust themselves, and most students will respond positively to this approach. Obviously, this "group" approach has the potential for abuse, but the benefits have been worth the efforts.

4. One final comment about the attitude and role of the instructor. Exploration and use of the Writing-As-Learning activities demands that instructors have a different attitude toward learning and writing: if the instructor attempts to utilize these techniques with a traditional attitude toward learning and writing, the assignments will fail miserably. Instructors must be positive and encouraging while demanding quality work from our students.

The importance of instructor modeling is worth repeating. We lose credibility if our students do not see us write at least as often as they do. Whether we write responses to the assignments, work on future lesson plans, or respond to assignments, allowing students to see us write is crucial in reinforcing our belief in the value and importance of writing.

## THE BEGINNING?

Hopefully, the concept of Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing-As-Learning is somewhat clearer and more intriguing. Also hopefully, the attached appendices and bibliography will be of interest and value. The use of these strategies demands time and effort before exploration and time to utilize effectively, but the rewards are impressive. Again, if I can be of further assistance, please contact me at the address on the cover.

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APPENDIX A

## "Writing As Learning" Activity Worksheet

Complete all sections as specifically as possible. Students must be aware of the sections B - F; however, sharing the entire worksheet is probably most effective.

A. SUBJECT:

INSTRUCTOR:

DATE OF PRESENTATION:

B. BACKGROUND MATERIAL NEEDED:

TEXT: PAGES:

OTHER BACKGROUND MATERIAL NEEDED: SOURCE (library, interviews, etc.):

POSSIBLE TIE INTO PREVIOUS LESSONS/ACTIVITIES:

C. SPECIFIC CONTENT OBJECTIVES:

D. WRITING ASSIGNMENT(S):

FORM(S): LENGTH:

SPECIFIC ASSIGNMENT(S):

CHOICES OR OPTIONS OF ASSIGNMENTS:

CREATE OWN ASSIGNMENT OPTION:

INDIVIDUAL OR/AND GROUP PROJECT:

DUE DATE:

CLASS TIME FOR WORK: WHEN:

E. EVALUATION/GRADING CRITERIA FOR ASSIGNMENT(S):

GRADED OR PASS/FAIL:

SPECIFIC CRITERIA:

(suggest including "Demonstrate acceptable use of Standard Written English)

F. POSSIBLE CLASS PRE-WRITING ACTIVITIES:

SAMPLES TO DISCUSS:

COMPLETE SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT(S) AS CLASS:

G. WRITING PROCESS INVOLVEMENT:

TIME FOR GROUP WORK/INTER-ACTION:

TIME FOR TEACHER-STUDENT CONFERENCES:

(Encourage use of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet"/"Praise-Question-Polish" technique throughout the completion of the assignment)

H. INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION/FOLLOW-UP OF THE ACTIVITY

QUALITY OF STUDENT PAPERS:

GENERAL STUDENT REACTION TO ASSIGNMENT (BIGGEST PROBLEMS/CONCERNS):

SHARE REACTION WITH CLASS:

SHARE SAMPLES OF PAPERS (ORALLY/REPRODUCE/POST):

I. POSSIBLE REVISION/IMPROVEMENT IN ASSIGNMENT:

POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES:

Save this sheet: share with others.

APPENDIX B

WRITING ASSIGNMENT WORKSHEET

This sheet is a suggested guide to help you with your major writing assignments. Write the "answers" in your own words or "think" them in your own words.

NAME: _____

SUBJECT: _____

PAPER DUE DATE: _____

ASSIGNMENT: (A) Formal assignment (what the teacher/textbook says):

(B) Assignment in my words:

(Double check my understanding of the assignment with the teacher)

AUDIENCE (To whom am I writing this?): _____

INTENTION (What do I want to accomplish in this paper?): _____

_____

LENGTH REQUIRED: _____

EVALUATIVE CRITERIA (How will my paper be graded?):

SPECIAL NOTES OR INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT THE PAPER:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION NEEDED?

WHAT?

WHERE CAN I FIND IT?

WHEN CAN I WORK ON THIS PAPER?

POSSIBLE PRE-WRITING ACTIVITIES (A) Class activities:

(B) Own activities:

CAN I WORK WITH OTHERS ON THIS PAPER?

WHOM?

WHEN?

AFTER PRE-WRITING ACTIVITIES AND THINKING, WHAT ARE THE MAJOR IDEAS I WANT TO SHARE IN THIS PAPER?

WRITING SELF-DIAGNOSIS/IMPROVEMENT (What writing skills do I want to work on in this paper?):

AFTER WRITING A DRAFT AND SEEKING RESPONSES FROM OTHERS (seek a wide range of oral "Praise-Question-Polish" responses and written "Reader Evaluation Sheet" responses):

WHAT DID THEY LIKE?

WHAT QUESTIONS DID THEY HAVE?

WHAT SUGGESTIONS DID THEY HAVE?

INSTRUCTOR RESPONSES AND SUGGESTIONS:

POSSIBLE REVISION ACTIVITIES/IDEAS:

AFTER WRITING A REVISED DRAFT AND SEEKING RESPONSES FROM OTHERS (again seek a wide range of oral and written responses):

WHAT DID THEY LIKE?

WHAT QUESTIONS DID THEY HAVE?

WHAT SUGGESTIONS DID THEY HAVE?

(Repeat for each revision until you are satisfied)

AS I PREPARED THE FINAL DRAFT FOR SHARING/EVALUATION, DID I EDIT AND PROOFREAD CAFEFULLY?

BEFORE SUBMISSION, DID I HAVE AT LEAST THREE (3) PEOPLE READ MY PAPER TO DOUBLE-CHECK FOR CORRECTNESS?

1.

2.

3.

---

GRADE/EVALUATION OF PAPER:

CAN IT BE REWRITTEN AND RESUBMITTED?

IDEAS FOR POSSIBLE REVISION:

SCHEDULE CONFERENCE WITH THE INSTRUCTOR:

APPENDIX C

READER EVALUATION SHEET

Please: ___respond to ___evaluate ___grade my paper. DRAFT NO._____

AUTHOR'S NAME_____ TITLE OF PAPER_____

READER'S NAME_____ DATE_____

I. What parts of my paper do you like?

What is the one best part of my paper?

II. What questions do you have about my paper?

III. What suggestions do you have to improve my revision of this paper?

IV. Please check the items which detract from the readability of my paper:

___mechanics ___word choice ___transitions ___sentence variety

___grammar ___spelling ___usage ___vivid/precise wording

V. Thank you for reading my paper and filling out this sheet. Please make any additional comments about my paper on the back of this sheet. I hope to discuss my paper with you before beginning my next draft.

APPENDIX D

The Handout Page

Donald M. Murray

## A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING ESSAYS

### I. Content

1. Does the paper demonstrate independent thinking? Are the ideas earned, or merely borrowed from elsewhere?
2. Does the writer have a controlling idea or purpose? Is that idea or purpose always clear, or is the reader sometimes unsure of how the material is intended to be taken?
3. Are ideas clearly defined and fully developed? Does the writer explore the subject in depth, considering implications and possibilities, or is the thinking superficial?
4. Is there enough specific information, and is that information more than just common knowledge?

### II. Point of View

5. Is the writer's manner appropriate to the audience and purpose?

### III. Organization

6. Is the paper coherent? Would it be easier to follow if some of the material were rearranged? Is there any unnecessary material?
7. Is the material in the most effective order? Do the most important points get sufficient emphasis? Do lesser points get too much emphasis?
8. Are individual paragraphs unified, coherent, and fully developed?

### IV. Style

9. Can the writer vary the lengths and types of sentences to avoid monotony and achieve special emphasis?
10. Are the writer's words precise and distinctive, or do they tend to be vague, trite, or bland?

### V. Mechanics

11. To what extent do errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation detract from the readability and authority of the paper?

### VI. Degree of Difficulty

12. How ambitious is the paper? Has the writer attempted something difficult, or played it safe?

Thomas Carnicelli
University of New Hampshire

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APPENDIX E

"Reflective Responses"

"Reflective Responses" are open-ended value statements which give students practice in thoughtful reflection and can be used in a number of ways to increase and improve class discussion and to reduce student apprehension about writing.

"Reflective Responses" are completed by giving students an open-ended question, time to respond in writing, and then having them read exactly what they have written. Early in a course it is often beneficial to collect the responses and read them anonymously as a basis for discussion: however, as classes become more trusting, students will be more willing to read their responses. Again, the key is to have read exactly what they have written, not summarize it.

The major benefit of the "Reflective Response" is that all students will have some response to the question and thus have some contribution to the discussion. As in all effective brain-storming, teacher and class reactions to responses should be positive and encouraging as possible (unless the question is designed to provoke debate).

As teachers, our completion of the "Reflective Response" questions and our willingness to share our responses is essential in providing an important role model for students.

"Reflective Responses" have many uses:

1. They can be used to introduce a literature unit or specific novels by asking open-ended questions about topics in the unit/novel before reading.
2. They can be used to begin and focus class discussion after the reading or viewing of literature by asking specific open-ended questions about the work.
3. They can be used to re-direct or re-focus class discussion which has become "off-center." Simply stop the discussion, tell students it is "Reflective Response" time, ask a question which demands that students focus their thinking

more sharply on the topic, give time for completion, and begin the discussion again using the more focused responses as the basis.

4. They can be used as one of the most effective review methods. The "Reflective Response" question is simply: "What I still do not understand about _____ is_____."

5. The most important teacher benefit of the "Reflective Response" technique is in helping us focus on what we are attempting to accomplish in the classroom. If we keep asking ourselves to respond to: "What I want my students to learn in this lesson/unit/course is _____," we will force ourselves to become much more effective and efficient in our teaching.

"Reflective Responses" are nothing new, but they can be utilized in many ways to help us and our students in gaining and sharing knowledge and in making writing less threatening. I am sure there are many more uses for the "Reflective Response" technique than those I have listed, and I would be interested in learning how others use such a technique.

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FROM: James Upton
SUB: "Worksheets for Writing Improvement" Information

Worksheets have long been an important and valuable part of many language arts/writing classrooms; unfortunately, some types of worksheets have been overused and abused. Too often, students see the worksheets as simply busywork which are unrelated to the actual writing demands of the course and the writing demands in other areas. The "Writing Assignment Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" are worksheets directly related to improving each specific writing assignment while giving students repeated remediation, reinforcement, and enrichment of the elements within the writing process. The following is a general overview of some of the uses and benefits of the two worksheets. I would encourage instructors to experiment with, modify, and utilize the worksheets in as many ways as possible.

I would be interested to hear of any other uses for the sheets and techniques. If I can answer any questions or be of further assistance, please contact me.

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## "Writing As Learning Activity Worksheet"

This worksheet is for teachers, not students, and is presented here as a frame of reference for the student "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" (and oral "Praise-Question-Polish" technique). The "Writing As Learning Activity Worksheet" was designed primarily for use by content area instructors who wished to explore/utilize writing-as-learning activities in their courses; however, many language arts/writing instructors have begun to utilize the "Writing As Learning Activity Worksheet" to help them design more complete and effective writing assignments (there is indeed a content to writing instruction). Not only does instructor use of the "Writing As Learning Activity Worksheet" encourage more careful and specific planning of each individual writing assignment and of the entire course, but insuring that the instructor's wording and intention on the "Writing As Learning Activity Worksheet" corresponds to the student's understanding of the wording and intention on the "Writing Activity Worksheet" reduces misunderstanding about the nature, purpose, and criteria of each assignment and of the course. Again, the "Writing As Learning Activity Worksheet" is shared to make the frame of reference for student use of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" clear.

## "Writing Activity Worksheet" and "Reader Evaluation Sheet" Worksheets

The underlying philosophy and goals of these two student worksheets are important to emphasize. Like all elements within the writing process,

effective use of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" (and oral "Praise-Question-Polish" technique) are acquired skills, and students must be given continual positive practice in utilizing these. All student writers improve each assignment and learn to write more effectively by doing the actual writing, and just as importantly like all writing-as-learning strategies, the completion of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" helps student writers learn more about the specific assignment and about the writing process by forcing them to think/write about these. Like almost all educational experiences, writing instruction is most effective if it is heuristic, and the most valuable student learning occurs inductively. Despite some occasional early student confusion, writing-as-learning techniques work extremely well in language arts/writing classes, and the "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" are based on the writing-as-learning concept.

The "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" were also developed and are used for very practical reasons. As language arts/writing instructors, we all know that our classes are too large, and despite our most sincere intentions and dedication, we simply can not provide the individual responses needed to help each of our students. One of the major benefits and goals of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" is to help students become independent, self-confident, and successful writers within the structure and limitations of the classroom. Students must learn to effectively utilize others throughout the writing process; they must learn that most successful writing is a "group" activity. Obviously, the most important long-term benefit of these worksheets is to help students become independent, self-confident, and

successful lifelong thinkers and writers. Like parenting, one of the major goals of formal education is to make students independent of the system and the instructors, and the "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" can help achieve this. I am pleased with the numbers of former students who request copies of these worksheets for use in other courses and in college.

Time is also crucial in the use of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet." As instructors, we need to model and utilize the "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" techniques with individuals and classes throughout the course, and we must provide the time needed for effective student writing and use of these worksheets. Utilizing the worksheets does require time and will reduce the quantity of completed papers in the course. However, we must provide the time needed for use of these to emphasize their importance, and the improved quality of student writing and understanding of the writing process is worth the time investment.

I think it is important to have unlimited blank copies of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" available in the classroom, and we should encourage students to utilize these for all major writing assignments.

Both the "Writing Assignment Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" (and oral "Praise-Question-Polish" technique) can be effectively utilized in the writing lab to make the students' experiences in these as valuable as possible.

"WRITING ACTIVITY WORKSHEET"

The "Writing Activity Worksheet" is the student version of the instructor's "Writing As Learning Activity Worksheet." Many times students do not do well on writing assignments because they do not fully understand the assignment and/or do not fully understand/utilize the writing process. As the wording and nature of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" suggest, it is designed to help students better understand each specific assignment and the writing process by having the students write the specific assignment and write about and think about the specific assignment and writing in general.

With early writing assignments, it is effective to have students complete the "Writing Activity Worksheet" as they work on the assignment as a group project and use the completed sheets as the basis for class discussion about the specific assignment, the "Writing Assignment Worksheet" itself, and the writing process in general. This initial group use of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" can be most important in providing guided practice in working on specific assignments, in completing the "Writing Activity Worksheet," and in introducing and reinforcing the writing process.

It is also effective to share our "Writing As Learning Activity Worksheet" with students to show them the relationship of our perception of the assignment as designed and how the "Writing Activity Worksheet" helps insure that clear communication occurs. Similarly, we should complete the writing assignments we ask of our students, and we should complete a "Writing Activity Worksheet" as we write and should share this with our students.

Monitoring both the actual student writing and the completion of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" throughout the assignment and the course can

aid significantly in making our assessments of and suggestions for improving both individual and group writing.

To reinforce the importance of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" concept and approach to writing improvement, students can be required to turn in the worksheet with each assignment and be given some grade or credit for this.

Students should be encouraged to keep all completed writings and all completed "Writing Assignment Worksheets;" the worksheets become excellent sources of ideas for individual pre-writing and revision activities and for aid in self-diagnosis of writing improvement and problems.

To reinforce the importance of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" concept, we should also encourage students to utilize the "Writing Activity Worksheet" for all major writing assignments in all courses and our willingness to help them utilize the worksheet for such assignments.

Again, the "Writing Assignment Worksheet" is not meant to be a cure-all for writing problems; like quality writing, the "Writing Assignment Worksheet" requires time and effort to utilize effectively. The use of the "Writing Assignment Worksheet" is also not meant to diminish the importance of specific pre-writing and revision activites or other writing-related activities. The "Writing Activity Worksheet" provides the opportunity for students to improve their writing skills and attitudes through their actual writing and through writing-as-learning activities. The sections of the "Writing Activity Worksheet" can be emphasized, deleted, or modified as needed for each student and for each class.

"Reader Evaluation Sheet"

The "Reader Evaluation Sheet" is based on Bill Lyons' "Praise-Question-Polish" response approach to writing improvement and can be utilized effectively with the "Writing Assignment Worksheet" or to provide any non-threatening response to student writing. Again as with the "Writing Assignment Worksheet," the written "Reader Evaluation Sheet" responses and the oral "Praise-Question-Polish" responses are acquired skills, and we must provide adequate positive practice and reinforcement in utilizing these.

To benefit most from the "group approach" to writing improvement, students should utilize both the oral "Praise-Question-Polish" and the written "Reader Evaluation Sheet" methods of response. The basic guidelines for utilizing the oral "Praise-Question-Polish" and the written "Reader Evaluation Sheet" are the same:

1. The writer must complete the top of the "Reader Evaluation Sheet," and of most importance is the "Draft Number." The reader must know in what stage of the composing process the paper being read is in order to make responses most effectively. For example, if the paper being read is a very early draft, Section IV will not be utilized at all.

The "Reader Evaluation Sheet" works very well in utilizing the oral "Praise-Question-Polish" technique; the writer records the reader's responses as they discuss the paper.

2. The reader must read the entire paper before making any responses.

3. The responses, whether oral or written, must be in the order listed; the reader must "Praise-Question-Polish" in this order.

4. Unless requested to do so by the writer, the reader is to make no marks on the actual paper except "++" or "smiley face" to indicate sections

the reader believes are especially effective and a "?" for sections the reader finds unclear or ineffective. The reader may mark misspelled words, mechanical/grammatical errors, etc. if so requested by the writer; this editing usually occurs when the paper is near the end of the writing process and is near submission.

5. If the paper is near the end of the writing process, Sections II, III, and IV are ideally optional and may not require responses.

6. Section IV is to be marked only when the paper is in near-final draft, and these should be checked only if they detract from the readability and authority of the paper. This will help students see these "presentation skills" in a more realistic and effective perspective.

7. Section V is for other comments about the paper and is usually used to explore or discuss ideas about the content or related ideas.

The "Writing Assignment Worksheet" makes reference to both the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" and to the oral "Praise-Question-Polish" technique, and students should be encouraged to seek both oral and written responses to their work and to provide both oral and written responses to the works of others.

Effective responses on the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" and in the oral "Praise-Question-Polish" technique are acquired skills, and students need guided practice in such responses. One of the major uses of the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" is early in the course. If we distribute sample essays, explain the general guidelines for completing the "Reader Evaluation Sheet," give students time to complete the sheet, and then use their responses to generate discussions about the importance of response in improving writing and about writing values (what is "good" writing), we can stimulate student thinking about writing while introducing and practicing response techniques.

This group use of the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" should continue throughout the course to emphasize the importance of response, and we can effectively introduce writing assignments by asking students to respond on the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" or orally in "Praise-Question-Polish" to the type of writing which we will ask them to complete.

Students should be encouraged and given time to utilize both the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" and the "Praise-Question-Polish" technique throughout the course and completion of the "Writing Assignment Worksheet." In addition, the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" can be utilized is several other important ways.

To emphasize the importance of the response in writing improvement, students can be required to turn in a given number of completed "Reader Evaluation Sheets" with each finished paper and credit may be given for this.

Instructors may complete the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" before a conference about a paper if limited class time is available.

Students can asked to complete a "Reader Evaluation Sheet" about their own works to help them with self-diagnosis of a paper and of their writing skills.

The "Reader Evaluation Sheet" can be used as the method for formal evaluation or grading of a paper.

The "Reader Evaluation Sheet" is one of the most effective ways to involve parents in their children's writing; we can require that students seek parent completion of the "Reader Evaluation Sheet."

The "Reader Evaluation Sheet" can be used to ask students to respond to a body of their own work, a quarter's work or a semester's work, to help them diagnose strengths, improvements, and problems.

We should encourage students to utilize the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" for all major writing assignments.

Like all effective writing-related skills, the use of the "Writing Assignment Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" are acquired skills which take instructor modeling and directed positive practice and reinforcement. However, the time and effort spent in developing effective student use of these techniques and in the resulting improved thinking/writing skills are worthwhile. The "Writing Activity Worksheet" and the "Reader Evaluation Sheet" are not substitutes for the actual writing process; hopefully they are important supplements which more efficiently help students become independent self-confident thinkers and writers.